

S.W.P. X

T H E
 D A N G E R
 O F
 An Unconverted
 M I N I S T R Y,
 Considered in a
 S E R M O N

On MARK VI. 34.

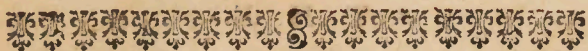
Preached at Nottingham, in Pennsylvania,
 March 8. ANNO 1739,40.

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Jerem. V. 30, 31. *A wonderful and horrible Thing is committed in the Land: The Prophets prophesy falsely, and the Priests bear Rule by their Means, and my People love to have it so; and what will they do in the End thereof?*

P H I L A D E L P H I A:

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To the People of Nottingham,

The Epistle Dedicatory.

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Dear Friends!

I Thought it proper to dedicate to you the following Sermon, which I delivered among you, as a Testimony of my Regard for you; and desire that you might be directed in the Choice of a Minister, that so that important Affair might be managed, to your spiritual and immortal Benefit.

If any should object against the Stile, and say, That it is too pointed; I answer, That it is not keener than the Reflections of Christ himself against the old Pharisees. So far as I know my Heart, it is Grief for the Injuries that have been done to the Church of God by natural Ministers, that has extorted such Acrimony from my Pen.

If there be any Rule of any Church, that seems to contradict what is offered in the following Discourse, it ought to be considered, that there is a great Difference between the flourishing and declining State of the Church, and that Every general Rule admits of Exceptions.

May the LORD scourge Hirelings out of his Temple, and supply you with a faithful Minister, according to His own Heart, that may feed you with Knowledge and Understanding. I remain

Your hearty Well-wisher and humble Servant,

G. TENNENT.



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MARK VI. 34.

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much People, and was moved with Compassion towards them, because they were as Sheep not having a Shepherd.

S a faithful Ministry is a great Ornament, A Blessing, and Comfort, to the Church of GOD; even the Feet of such Messengers are beautiful: So on the contrary, an ungodly Ministry is a great Curse and Judgment: These Caterpillars labour to devour every green Thing.

THERE is nothing that may more justly call forth our saddest Sorrows, and make all our Powers and Passions mourn, in the most doleful Accents, the most incessant, insatiable, and deploring Agonies; than the melancholy Case of such, who have no faithful Ministry! This Truth is set before our Minds in a strong Light, in the Words that I have chosen now to insist upon; in which we have an Account of our LORD's Grief, with the Causes of it.

WE are informed, That our dear Redeemer was moved with Compassion towards them. The Original Word signifies the strongest and most vehement Pity, issuing from the innermost Bowels.

BUT what was the Cause of this great and compassionate Commotion in the Heart of Christ? It was because he saw much People as Sheep having no Shepherd. Why, had the People then no Teachers? O yes! they had Heaps of Pharisee-Teachers, that

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came out, no doubt after they had been at the Feet of *Gamaliel* the usual Time, and according to the Acts, Canons, and Traditions of the Jewish Church. But notwithstanding of the great Crowds of these Orthodox, Letter-learned and regular Pharisees, our Lord laments the unhappy Case of that great Number of People, who, in the Days of his Flesh, had no better Guides: Because that those were as good as none (in many Respects) in our Saviour's Judgment. For all them, the People were as Sheep without a Shepherd.

FROM the Words of our Text, the following Proposition offers itself to our Consideration, *viz.*

That the Case of such is much to be pitied, who have no other, but Pharisee-Shepherds, or unconverted Teachers.

IN discoursing upon this Subject, I would

- I. *Enquire into the Characters of the Old Pharisee-Teachers.*
- II. *Shew, why the Case of such People, who have no better, should be pitied. And*
- III. *Shew, how Pity should be expressed upon this mournful Occasion! And*

FIRST I am to enquire into the *Characters of the Old Pharisee-Teachers.* Now, I think the most notorious Branches of their Character, were these, *viz. Pride, Policy, Malice, Ignorance, Covetousness, and Bigotry to human Inventions in religious Matters.*

THE old Pharisees were very proud and conceity; they loved the uppermost Seats in the Synagogues, and to be called Rabbi, Rabbi; they were masterly and positive in their Assertions, as if forsooth Knowledge must die with them; they look'd upon others that differed from them, and the common People, with an Air of Disdain; and especially any who had a Respect for JESUS and his Doctrine, and disliked them; they judged such accursed. THE

THE old Pharisee-Shepherds were as crafty as Foxes; they tried by all means to ensnare our Lord, by their captious Questions, and to expose him to the Displeasure of the State; while in the mean Time, by sly and sneaking Methods, they tried to secure for themselves the Favour of the Grandees, and the People's Applause; and this they obtained to their Satisfaction. *Job. 7. 48.*

BUT while they exerted the Craft of Foxes, they did not forget to breath forth the Cruelty of Wolves, in a malicious Aspersing the Person of Christ, and in a violent Opposing of the Truths, People, and Power of his Religion. Yea, the most stern and strict of them, were the King-leaders of the Party: Witness *Saul's Journey to Damascus*, with Letters from the Chief Priest, to bring bound to *Jerusalem*, all that he could find of that Way. It's true the Pharisees did not proceed to violent Measures with our Saviour and his Disciples just at first; but that was not owing to their good Nature, but their Policy; for they feared the People. They must keep the People in their Interests: Ay, that was the main Chance, the Compass that directed all their Proceedings; and therefore such sly cautious Methods must be pursued as might consist herewith. They wanted to root vital Religion out of the World; but they found it beyond their Thumb.

ALTHOUGH some of the old Pharisee-Shepherds had a very fair and strict Out-side; yet were they ignorant of the New Birth: Witness Rabbi *Nicodemus*, who talk'd like a Fool about it. Hear how our LORD cursed those plaister'd Hypocrites, *Mat. 23. 27, 28.* *Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye are like whited Sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead Bones, and of all Uncleanness. Even so ye also appear righteous unto Men, but within ye are full of Hypocrisie*

Hypocrisie and Iniquity. Ay, if they had but a little of the Learning then in Fashion, and a fair Outside, they were presently put into the Priests Office, though they had no Experience of the New Birth. O sad!

THE old Pharisees, for all their long Prayers and other pious Pretences, had their Eyes, with Judas, fixed upon the Bag. Why, they came into the Priests Office for a Piece of Bread; they took it up as a Trade, and therefore endeavoured to make the best Market of it; they could: O Shame!

IT may be further observ'd, That the Pharisee-Teachers in Christ's Time, were great Bigots to small Matters in Religion. *Mat. 23. 23. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye pay Tyth of Mint, and Anise, and Cumin, and have omitted the weightier Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy and Faith.* The Pharisees were fired with a Party-Zeal; they compassed Sea and Land to make a Profelyte; and yet when he was made, they made him twofold more the Child of Hell than themselves. They were also bigotted to Human Inventions in Religious Matters: *Paul* himself, while he was a natural Man, was wonderful zealous for the Traditions of the Fathers: Ay, those poor blind Guides, as our LORD testifies, strained at a Gnat, and swallowed a Camel.

AND what a mighty Respect had they for the Sabbath Day forsooth? in so much that Christ and his Disciples must be charged with the Breach thereof, for doing Works of Mercy and Necessity. Ah the Rottenness of those Hypocrites! It was not so much Respect to the Sabbath, as Malice against Christ; that was the Occasion of the Charge; they wanted some plausible Pretence to offer against him, in order to blacken his Character.

AND

AND what a great Love had they in Pretence to those pious Prophets, who were dead before they were born? while in the mean Time they were persecuting the Prince of Prophets! Hear how the King of the Church speaks to them, upon this Head: *Matth. 23. 29—33. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites; because ye build the Tombs of the Prophets, and garnish the Sepulchres of the Righteous; and say, If we had been in the Days of our Fathers, we would not have been Partakers with them in the Blood of the Prophets. Ye Serpents, ye Generation of Vipers, how can ye escape the Damnation of Hell?* The

SECOND GENERAL HEAD of Discourse, is to shew, *Why such People, who have no better than the old Pharisee-Teachers, are to be pitied?* And

I. Natural Men have no Call of GOD to the Ministerial Work, under the Gospel-Dispensation.

Isn't it a principal Part of the ordinary Call of GOD to the Ministerial Work, to aim at the Glory of GOD, and, in Subordination thereto, the Good of Souls, as their chief Marks in their Undertaking that Work? And can any natural Man on Earth do this? No! no! Every Skin of them has an evil Eye; for no Cause can produce Effects above its own Power. Are not wicked Men forbid to meddle in Things sacred? *Pf. 50. 16. But unto the Wicked, GOD saith, What hast thou to do to declare my Statutes, or that thou shouldst take my Covenant in thy Mouth?* Now, are not all unconverted Men wicked Men? does not the Lord JESUS inform us, *John 10. 1. That he who entreth not by the Door into the Sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other Way, the same is a Thief and a Robber?* In the 9th v. Christ tells us, That *He is the Door*; and that *if any Man enter in by him, he shall be saved, by him, i. e. By Faith in him, says Henry.* Hence we read of a

Door of Faith, being opened to the Gentiles. *Acts* 14. 27. It confirms this Gloss, that Salvation is annexed to the Entrance before-mentioned. Remarkable is that Saying of our Saviour, *Matth.* 4. 19. *Follow me, and I will make you Fishers of Men.* See, our LORD will not make Men Ministers, 'til they follow him. Men that do not follow Christ, may fish faithfully for a good Name, and for worldly Pelf; but not for the Conversion of Sinners to God. Is it reasonable to suppose, that they will be earnestly concerned for others Salvation, when they slight their own? Our LORD reprov'd *Nicodemus* for taking upon him the Office of instructing others, while he himself was a Stranger to the New Birth, *Job.* 3. 10. *Art thou a Master of Israel, and knowest not these Things?* The Apostle *Paul* (in *1 Tim.* 1. 12.) thanks GOD for counting him faithful, and putting him into the Ministry; which plainly supposes, That GOD Almighty does not send Pharisees and natural Men into the Ministry: For how can these Men be faithful, that have no Faith? It's true, Men may put them into the Ministry, through Unfaithfulness, or Mistake; or Credit and Money may draw them, and the Devil may drive them into it, knowing by long Experience, of what special Service they may be to his Kingdom in that Office: But GOD sends not such hypocritical Varlets. Hence *Timothy* was directed by the Apostle *Paul*, to commit the ministerial Work to faithful Men. *2 Tim.* 2. 2. And do not these Qualifications, necessary for Church-Officers, specified *1 Tim.* 3. 7, 8, 9, 11. & *Tit.* 1. 7, 8. plainly suppose converting Grace? How else can they avoid being greedy of filthy Lucre? How else can they hold the Mystery of Faith in a pure Conscience, and be faithful in all Things? How else can they be Lovers of Good, sober, just, holy, temperate?

2. The Ministry of natural Men is uncomfortable to gracious Souls. The

The Enmity that is put between the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent, will now and then be creating Jarrs: And no wonder; for as it was of old, so it is now, *He that was born after the Flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit.* This Enmity is not one Grain less, in unconverted Ministers, than in others; tho' possibly it may be better polished with Wit and Rhetorick, and gilded with the specious Names of Zeal, Fidelity, Peace, good Order, and Unity.

Natural Men, not having true Love to Christ and the Souls of their Fellow-Creatures, hence their Discourses are cold and sapless, and as it were freeze between their Lips! And not being sent of GOD, they want that divine Authority, with which the faithful Ambassadors of Christ are clothed, who herein resemble their blessed Master, of whom it is said, *That He taught as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes.* Matth. 7. 29.

And Pharisee-Teachers, having no Experience of a special Work of the Holy Ghost, upon their own Souls, are therefore neither inclined to, nor fitted for Discoursing, frequently, clearly, and pathetically, upon such important Subjects. The Application of their Discourses, is either short, or indistinct and general. They difference not the precious from the vile, and divide not to every Man his Portion, according to the Apostolical Direction to *Timothy*. No! they carelessly offer a common Mess to their People, and leave it to them, to divide it among themselves, as they see fit. This is indeed their general Practice, which is bad enough: But sometimes they do worse, by misapplying the Word, through Ignorance, or Anger. They often strengthen the Hands of the Wicked, by promising him Life. They comfort People, before they convince them; sow before they plow; and are busy in raising a
 Fabrick

Fabrick, before they lay a Foundation. These foolish Builders do but strengthen Men's carnal Security, by their soft, selfish, cowardly Discourses. They have not the Courage, or Honesty, to thrust the Nail of Terror into sleeping Souls; nay, sometimes they strive with all their Might, to fasten Terror into the Hearts of the Righteous, and so to make those sad, whom GOD would not have made sad! And this happens, when pious People begin to suspect their Hypocrisie, for which they have good Reason. I may add, That inasmuch as Pharisee-Teachers seek after Righteousness as it were by the Works of the Law themselves, they therefore do not distinguish as they ought, between *Law* and *Gospel*, in their Discourses to others. They keep Driving, Driving, to Duty, Duty, under this Notion, That it will recommend natural Men to the Favour of GOD, or entitle them to the Promises of Grace and Salvation: And thus those blind Guides fix a deluded World upon the false Foundation of their own Righteousness, and so exclude them from the dear Redeemer. All the Doings of unconverted Men, not proceeding from the Principles of Faith, Love, and a new Nature, nor being directed to the divine Glory as their highest End, but flowing from, and tending to Self, as their Principle and End; are doubtless damnably wicked in their Manner of Performance, and do deserve the Wrath and Curse of a Sin-avenging GOD; neither can any other Encouragement be justly given them, but this, That in the Way of Duty, there is a Peradventure or Probability of obtaining Mercy.

And natural Men, wanting the Experience of those spiritual Difficulties, which pious Souls are exposed to, in this Vale of Tears; they know not how to speak a Word to the Weary in Season.

Their Prayers are also cold; little Child-like Love to God, or Pity to poor perishing Souls, runs thro' their Veins.

Their

Their Conversation hath nothing of the Savour of Christ, neither is it perfumed with the Spices of Heaven. They seem to make as little Distinction in their Practice, as Preaching. They love those Unbelievers, that are kind to them, better than many Christians, and chuse them for Companions; contrary to *Pf.* 15. 4. *Pf.* 119. 115. & *Gal.* 6. 10. Poor Christians are stunted and starv'd, who are put to feed on such bare Pastures, and such dry Nurses; as the Rev. Mr. *Hildersham* justly calls them. It's only when the wise Virgins sleep, that they can bear with those dead Dogs, that can't bark; but when the LORD revives his People, they can't but abhor them! O! it is ready to break their very Hearts with Grief, to see, how luke-warm those Pharisee-Teachers are in their publick Discourses, while Sinners are sinking into Damnation, in Multitudes! But

3. The Ministry of natural Men, is for the most part unprofitable; which is confirmed by a threefold Evidence, *viz.* of Scripture, Reason, and Experience. Such as the LORD sends not, he himself assures us, shall not profit the People at all. *Jer.* 23. 32. Mr. *Pool* justly glosseth upon this Passage of sacred Scripture, thus, *viz.* 'That none can expect God's Blessing upon their Ministry, that are not called and sent of GOD into the Ministry. And right Reason will inform us, how unfit Instruments they are to negotiate that Work they pretend to. Is a blind Man fit to be a Guide in a very dangerous Way? Is a dead Man fit to bring others to Life? a mad Man fit to give Counsel in a Matter of Life and Death? Is a possessed Man fit to cast out Devils? a Rebel, an Enemy to GOD, fit to be sent on an Embassy of Peace, to bring Rebels into a State of Friendship with GOD? a Captive bound in the massy Chains of Darknes and Guilt, a proper Person,

son, to set others at Liberty? a Leper, or one that has Plague-sores upon him, fit to be a good Physician? Is an ignorant Rustick, that has never been at Sea in his Life, fit to be a Pilot, to keep Vessels from being dashed to Pieces upon Rocks and Sand-banks? ' Isn't an unconverted Minister like
 ' a Man who would learn others to swim, before he
 ' has learn'd it himself, and so is drowned in the
 ' Act, and dies like a Fool?

I may add, that sad Experience verifies what has been now observed, concerning the Unprofitableness of the Ministry of unconverted Men. Look into the Congregations of unconverted Ministers, and see what a sad Security reigns there; not a Soul convinced that can be heard of, for many Years together; and yet the Ministers are easy; for they say they do their Duty! Ay, a small Matter will satisfy us, in the Want of that, which we have no great Desire after. But when Persons have their Eyes opened, and their Hearts set upon the Work of God; they are not so soon satisfied with their Doings, and with Want of Success for a Time. O! they mourn with *Micah*, that they are as those that gather the Summer-Fruits, as the Grape-gleaning of the Vintage.— Mr. *Baxter* justly observes, ' That those
 ' who speak about their Doings in the aforesaid
 ' Manner, are like to do little Good to the Church
 ' of God.' ' But many Ministers (as Mr. *Bracel*
 ' observes) think the Gospel flourishes among them
 ' when the People are in Peace, and many come to
 ' hear the Word, and to the Sacrament.' If with
 the other they get their Salaries well paid; O then
 it is fine Times indeed! in their Opinion. O sad!
 And they are full of Hopes, that they do good, tho'
 they know nothing about it. But what Comfort
 can a consciencious Man, who travels in Birth, that
 Christ may be form'd in his Hearers Hearts, take
 from

from what he knows not? Will a hungry Stomach be satisfied with Dreams about Meat? I believe not; tho' I confess a full one may.

What if some Instances could be shewn, of unconverted Ministers being Instrumental, in convincing Persons of their lost State? The Thing is very rare, and extraordinary. And for what I know, as many Instances may be given, of Satan's convincing Persons, by his Temptations. Indeed it's a kind of Chance-medly, both in respect of the Father, and his Children; when any such Event happens. And isn't this the Reason, why a Work of Conviction and Conversion has been so rarely heard of, for a long Time, in the Churches, till of late, *viz.* That the Bulk of her spiritual Guides, were stone-blind, and stone-dead!

4. The Ministry of natural Men is dangerous, both in respect of the Doctrines, and Practice of Piety. The Doctrines of *Original Sin*, *Justification by Faith alone*, and the other Points of *Calvinism*, are very cross to the Grain of unrenewed Nature. And tho' Men, by the Influence of a good Education, and Hopes of Preferment, may have the Edge of their natural Enmity against them blunted; yet it's far from being broken or removed; it's only the saving Grace of God, that can give us a true Relish, for those Nature-humbling Doctrines; and so effectually secure us from being infected by the contrary. Is not the Carnality of the Ministry, one great Cause of the general Spread of *Arminianism*, *Socinianism*, *Arianism*, and *Deism*, at this Day through the World?

And alas! what poor Guides are natural Ministers to those, who are under spiritual Trouble? they either slight such Distress altogether, and call it Melancholy, or Madness, or dawb those that are under it, with untemper'd Mortar. Our LORD
assures

assures us, That the Salt which hath lost its Savour, is good for nothing; some say, 'It gendres Worms and Vermine.' Now, what Savour have Pharisee-Ministers? In 'Truth, a very stinking One, both in the Nostrils of God and good Men. 'Be these 'Moral Negroes never so white in the Mouth, (as 'one expresseth it) yet will they hinder, instead of 'helping others, in at the strait Gate.' Hence is that Threatning of our LORD, against them, *Mat. 23. 13. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against Men; for ye neither go in yourselves, nor suffer those that are entering, to go in.* Pharisee-Teachers will with the utmost Hate oppose the very Work of God's Spirit, upon the Souls of Men; and labour by all Means to blacken it, as well as the Instruments, which the Almighty improves to promote the same; if it comes near their Borders, and interferes with their Credit or Interest. Thus did the Pharisees deal with our Saviour.

If it be objected, against what has been offer'd, under this General Head of Discourse, That *Judas* was sent by Christ; I answer, (1) That *Judas's* Ministry was partly Legal, inasmuch as during that Period, the Disciples were subject to Jewish Observances, and sent only to the House of *Israel*, *Matth. 10. 5, 6.* And in that they waited after Christ's Resurrection for another Mission, *Acts. 1. 4.* which we find they obtained, and that different from the former. *Matth. 28. 19.* (2) *Judas's* Ministry was extraordinary necessary, in order to fulfil some ancient Prophecies concerning him. *Acts 1. 16, 17, 18, 20. Job. 13. 18.* I fear that the Abuse of this Instance, has brought many *Judas'es* into the Ministry, whose chief Desire, like their great Grandfather, is to finger the Pence, and carry the Bag. But let such hireling murderous Hypocrites take Care, that they

they don't feel the Force of a Halter in this World, and an aggravated Damnation in the next.

Again, if it be objected, That *Paul* rejoyced, that the Gospel was preached, tho' of Contention, and not sincerely; I answer, The Expression signifies the Apostle's great Self-Denyal. Some laboured to eclipse his Fame and Character, by contentious Preaching, thinking thereby to afflict him; but they were mistaken; as to that, he was easy. For he had long before learned, to die to his own Reputation. The Apostle's Rejoycing was comparative only; he would rather that Christ should be preached out of Envy, than not at all. Especially considering the gross Ignorance of the Doctrinal Knowledge of the Gospel, which prevailed almost universally in that Age of the World. Besides the Apostle knew that that Tryal should be sanctified to him, to promote his spiritual Progress in Goodness, and perhaps prove a Mean of procuring his temporal Freedom; and therefore he would rejoyce. It is certain, we may both rejoyce and mourn, in relation to the same Thing, upon different Accounts, without any Contradiction. But the

THIRD GENERAL HEAD, was to shew, *How Pity should be expressed upon this mournful Occasion!*

My Brethren, we should mourn over those, that are destitute of faithful Ministers, and sympathize with them. Our Bowels should be moved with the most compassionate Tenderness, over those dear fainting Souls, that are *as Sheep having no Shepherd*; and that after the Example of our blessed LORD!

Dear Sirs! we should also most earnestly pray for them, that the compassionate Saviour may preserve them, by his mighty Power, thro' Faith unto Salvation; support their sinking Spirits, under the melancholy Uneasinesses of a dead Ministry; sanctify
and

and sweeten to them the dry Morsels they get under such blind Men, when they have none better to repair to.

And more especially, my Brethren, we should pray to the LORD of the Harvest, to send forth faithful Labourers into his Harvest; seeing that the Harvest truly is plenteous, but the Labourers are few. And O Sirs! how humble, believing, and importunate should we be in this Petition! O! let us follow the LORD, Day and Night, with Cries, Tears, Pleadings, and Groanings upon this Account! For GOD knows, there is a great Necessity of it. O! thou Fountain of Mercy, and Father of Pity, pour forth upon thy poor Children a Spirit of Prayer, for the Obtaining this important Mercy! Help, help, O Eternal GOD and Father, for Christ's sake!

And indeed, my Brethren, we should join our Endeavours to our Prayers. The most likely Method to stock the Church with a faithful Ministry, in the present Situation of Things, the publick Academies being so much corrupted and abused generally, is, To encourage private Schools, or Seminaries of Learning, which are under the Care of skilful and experienced Christians; in which those only should be admitted, who upon strict Examination, have in the Judgment of a reasonable Charity, the plain Evidences of experimental Religion. Pious and experienced Youths, who have a good natural Capacity, and great Desires after the Ministerial Work, from good Motives, might be sought for, and found up and down the Country, and put to Private Schools of the Prophets; especially in such Places, where the Publick ones are not. This Method, in my Opinion, has a noble Tendency, to build up the Church of God. And those who have any Love to Christ, or Desire after the Coming of his Kingdom, should be ready according to their Ability, to
give

give somewhat, from time to time, for the Support of such poor Youths, who have nothing of their own. And truly, Brethren, this Charity to the Souls of Men, is the most noble kind of Charity. O! if the Love of God be in you, it will constrain you to do something, to promote so noble and necessary a Work. It looks Hypocrite-like to go no further, when other Things are required, than cheap Prayer. Don't think it much, if the Pharisees should be offended at such a Proposal; these subtle selfish Hypocrites are wont to be scar'd about their Credit, and their Kingdom; and truly they are both little worth, for all the Bustle they make about them. If they could help it, they wou'dn't let one faithful Man come into the Ministry; and therefore their Opposition is an encouraging Sign. Let all the Followers of the Lamb stand up and act for GOD against all Opposers: Who is upon GOD's Side? who?

THE IMPROVEMENT of this Subject remains.
And,

I. If it be so, That the Case of those, who have no other, or no better than Pharisee-Teachers, is to be pitied: Then what a Scrole and Scene of Mourning, and Lamentation, and Wo, is opened! because of the Swarms of Locusts, the Crowds of Pharisees, that have as covetously as cruelly, crept into the Ministry, in this adulterous Generation! who as nearly resemble the Character given of the old Pharisees, in the Doctrinal Part of this Discourse, as one Crow's Egg does another. It is true some of the modern Pharisees have learned to prate a little more orthodoxly about the New Birth, than their Predecessor *Nicodemus*, who are, in the mean Time, as great Strangers to the feeling Experience of it, as he. They are blind who see not this to be the Case of the Body of the Clergy, of this Generation. And O!

that our Heads were Waters, and our Eyes a Fountain of Tears, that we could Day and Night lament, with the utmost Bitterness, the doleful Case of the poor Church of God, upon this account.

2. From what has been said, we may learn, That such who are contented under a dead Ministry, have not in them the Temper of that Saviour they profess. It's an awful Sign, that they are as blind as Moles, and as dead as Stones, without any spiritual Taste and Relish. And alas! isn't this the Case of Multitudes? If they can get one, that has the Name of a Minister, with a Band, and a Black Coat or Gown to carry on a Sabbath-days among them, although never so coldly, and insuccessfully; if he is free from gross Crimes in Practice, and takes good Care to keep at a due Distance from their Consciences, and is never troubled about his Insuccessfulness; O! think the poor Fools, that is a fine Man indeed; our Minister is a prudent charitable Man, he is not always harping upon Terror, and sounding Damnation in our Ears, like some rash-headed Preachers, who by their uncharitable Methods, are ready to put poor People out of their Wits, or to run them into Despair; O! how terrible a Thing is that Despair! Ay, our Minister, honest Man, gives us good Caution against it. Poor silly Souls! consider seriously these Passages, of the Prophet *Jeremiah*, c. 5. 30, 31.

3. We may learn, the Mercy and Duty of those that enjoy a faithful Ministry. Let such glorify God, for so distinguishing a Privilege, and labour to walk worthy of it, to all Well-pleasing; lest for their Abuse thereof, they be exposed to a greater Damnation.

4. If the Ministry of natural Men be as it has been represented; Then it is both lawful and expedient to go from them to hear Godly Persons; yea, it's so far from being sinful to do this, that one who
lives

lives under a pious Minister of lesser Gifts, after having honestly endeavour'd to get Benefit by his Ministry, and yet gets little or none, but doth find real Benefit and more Benefit elsewhere; I say, he may lawfully go, and that frequently, where he gets most Good to his precious Soul, after regular Application to the Pastor where he lives, for his Consent, and proposing the Reasons thereof; when this is done in the Spirit of Love and Meekness, without Contempt of any, as also without rash Anger, or vain Curiosity.

Natural Reason will inform us, that Good is desirable for its own sake. Now, as Dr. *Voetius* observes, Good added to Good, makes it a greater Good, and so more desirable; and therefore Evil as Evil, or a lesser Good, which is comparatively Evil, cannot be the Object of Desire.

There is a natural Instinct put even into the irrational Creatures, by the Author of their Being, to seek after the greater natural Good, as far as they know it. Hence the Birds of the Air fly to the warmer Climates, in order to shun the Winter-Cold, and also doubtless to get better Food; *For where the Carcass is, there the Eagles will be gathered together.* The Beasts of the Field seek the best Pastures, and the Fishes of the Ocean seek after the Food they like best.

But the written Word of God confirms the aforesaid Proposition, while God by it enjoins us, *to covet earnestly the best Gifts; as also to prove all Things, and hold fast that which is good.* 1 Cor. 12. 31. 1 Theff. 5. 2. And is it not the Command of God, that we should *grow in Grace?* 2 Pet. 3. 18. and 1 Pet. 2. 2. Now, does not every positive Command enjoin the Use of such Means, as have the directest Tendency to answer the End designed? namely, The Duty commanded. If there be a

Variety of Means, is not the best to be chosen? else how can the Choice be called rational, and becoming an intelligent Creature? To chuse otherwise knowingly, is it not contrary to common Sense, as well as Religion, and daily confuted by the common Practice of all the rational Creation, about Things of far less Moment and Consequence?

That there is a Difference and Variety in Preachers Gifts and Graces, is undeniably evident, from the united Testimony of Scripture and Reason.

And that there is a great Difference in the Degrees of Hearers Edification, under the Hearing of these different Gifts, is as evident to the Feeling of experienced Christians, as any Thing can be to Sight.

It is also an unquestionable Truth, that ordinarily GOD blesses most the best Gifts, for the Hearers Edification, as by the best Food he gives the best Nourishment. Otherwise the best Gifts would not be desirable, and GOD Almighty in the ordinary Course of his Providence, by not acting according to the Nature of Things, would be carrying on a Series of unnecessary Miracles; which to suppose, is unreasonable. The following Places of holy Scripture, confirm what has been last observed. *1 Cor.* 14. 12. *1 Tim.* 4. 14, 15, 16. *2 Tim.* 1. 6. & *Act.* 11. 24.

If God's People have a Right to the Gifts of all God's Ministers, pray, why mayn't they use them, as they have Opportunity? And if they should go a few Miles farther than ordinary, to enjoy those, which they profit most by; who do they wrong? Now, our LORD does inform his People, *1 Cor.* 3. 22. That *whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas; all was theirs.*

But the Example of our Dear Redeemer, will give farther Light in this Argument. Tho' many of the Hearers, not only of the Pharisees, but of

John

John the Baptist, came to hear our Saviour, and that not only upon Week-days, but upon Sabbath-days, and that in great Numbers, and from very distant Places; yet he reprov'd them not: And did not our Lord love the Apostle *John* more than the rest, and took him with him, before others, with *Peter* and *James*, to Mount *Tabor*, and *Gethsemany*? Matth. 17. and c. 26.

To bind Men to a particular Minister, against their Judgment and Inclinations, when they are more edified elsewhere, is carnal with a Witness; a cruel Oppression of tender Consciences, a Compelling of Men to Sin: For he that doubts, is damn'd if he eat; and whatsoever is not of Faith, is Sin.

Besides it is an unscriptural Infringment on Christian Liberty; 1 *Cor.* 3. 22. It's a Yoke worse than that of *Rome* itself. Dr. *Voetius* asserts, 'That even among the *Papists*, as to Hearing of Sermons, the People are not deprived of the Liberty of Choice.' It's a Yoke like that of *Egypt*, which cruel *Pharaoh* formed for the Necks of the oppressed *Israelites*, when he obliged them to make up their stated Task of Brick, but allowed them no Straw. So we must grow in Grace and Knowledge; but in the meantime, according to the Notion of some, we are confined from using the likeliest Means, to attain that End.

If the great Ends of Hearing may be attained as well, and better, by Hearing of another Minister than our own; then I see not, why we should be under a fatal Necessity of hearing him, I mean our Parish-Minister, perpetually, or generally. Now, what are, or ought to be, the Ends of Hearing, but the Getting of Grace, and Growing in it? *Rom.* 10. 14. 1 *Pet.* 2. 2. *As Babes desire the sincere Milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.* (Poor Babes like not dry Breasts, and living Men like not dead Pools.)

Pools.) Well then, and may not these Ends be obtained out of our Parish-line? *Faith* is said to come by *Hearing*, Rom. 10. But the Apostle doesn't add, *Your Parish-Minister*. Isn't the same Word preach'd out of our Parish? and is there any Restriction in the Promises of blessing the Word to those only, who keep within their Parish-line ordinarily? If there be, I have not yet met with it; yea, I can affirm, that so far as Knowledge can be had in such Cases, I have known Persons to get saving Good to their Souls, by Hearing over their Parish-line; and this makes me earnest in Defence of it.

That which ought to be the main Motive of Hearing any, *viz.* our Souls Good, or greater Good, will excite us, if we regard our own eternal Interest, to hear there, where we attain it; and he that hears with less Views, acts like a Fool, and a Hypocrite.

Now, if it be lawful to withdraw from the Ministry of a pious Man, in the Case aforesaid; how much more, from the Ministry of a natural Man? Surely, it is both lawful and expedient, for the Reasons offered in the Doctrinal Part of this Discourse: To which let me add a few Words more.

To trust the Care of our Souls to those who have little or no Care for their own, to those who are both unskilful and unfaithful, is contrary to the common Practice of considerate Mankind, relating to the Affairs of their Bodies and Estates; and would signify, that we set light by our Souls, and did not care what became of them. For if the Blind lead the Blind, will they not both fall into the Ditch?

Is it a strange Thing to think, that GOD does not ordinarily use the Ministry of his Enemies, to turn others to be his Friends, seeing he works by suitable Means?

I cannot think, that GOD has given any Promise, that he will be with, and bless the Labours of natural Ministers: For if he had, he would be surely as good as his Word. But I can neither see, nor hear of any Blessing upon these Men's Labours; unless it be a rare and wonderful Instance of Chancemedly! whereas the Ministry of faithful Men blossoms and bears Fruit, as the Rod of *Aaron*. *Jer. 23. 22. But if they had stood in my Counsel, and had caused my People to hear my Words, then they should have turned them from their evil Way, and from the Evil of their Doings.*

From such as have a Form of Godliness, and deny the Power thereof, we are enjoined to turn away, *2 Tim. 3. 5.* And are there not many such?

Our LORD advised his Disciples, to beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees, *Mat. 16. 6.* by which he shews that he meant their Doctrine and Hypocrisie, *Mark 8. 15. Luke 12. 1.* which were both four enough.

Memorable is the Answer of our LORD to his Disciples, *Mat. 15. 12, 13, 14.* *Then came his Disciples and said unto him, Knowest thou, that the Pharisees were offended? — And he answered and said, Every Plant which my Heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up: Let them alone; they be blind Leaders of the Blind: And if the Blind lead the Blind, both shall fall into the Ditch.*

If it is objected, That we are bid to go to hear those, that sit in *Moses' Chair*, *Mat. 23. 2, 3.* I would answer this, in the Words of a Body of dissenting Ministers, *viz.* ' That Sitting in *Moses' Chair*, signifies a Succeeding of *Moses* in the ordinary Part of his Office and Authority; so did *Joshua*, and the 70 Elders, *Exod. 18. 21—26.*

' Now, *Moses* was no Priest, (say they) tho' of

‘ *Levi’s* Tribe, but King in *Jeshurun*, a civil Ruler and Judge, chosen by God. *Exod.* 18. 13.’ Therefore no more is meant by the Scripture in the Objection, but that it is the Duty of People to hear and obey the lawful Commands of the Civil Magistrate, according to *Rom.* 13. 5.

If it be opposed to the preceding Reasonings, That such an Opinion and Practice would be apt to cause Heats and Contentions among People ;

I answer, That the aforesaid Practice, accompanied with Love, Meekness, and Humility, is not the proper Cause of those Divisions, but the *Occasion* only, or the Cause by Accident, and not by itself. If a Person exercising Modesty and Love in his Carriage to his Minister and Neighbours, through Uprightness of Heart, designing nothing but his own greater Good, repairs there frequently where he attains it ; is this any reasonable Cause of Anger ? will any be offended with him, because he loves his Soul, and seeks the greater Good thereof, and is not like a senseless Stone, without Choice, Sense, and Taste ? Pray, must we leave off every Duty, that is the Occasion of Contention or Division ? Then we must quit powerful Religion altogether. For *he that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer Persecution.* And particularly we must carefully avoid faithful Preaching : For that is wont to occasion Disturbances and Divisions, especially when accompanied with divine Power. *1 Thess.* 1. 5, 6. *Our Gospol came not unto you in Word only, but in Power :* And then it is added, That they received the Word in much Affliction. And the Apostle *Paul* informs us, *1 Cor.* 16. 9. That a great Door and effectual was open’d unto him, and that there were many Adversaries. Blessed *Paul* was accounted a common Disturber of the Peace, as well as *Elijah* long before him : And yet he left not off Preaching for all that. Yea, our
blessed

bleſſed LORD informs us, That he came not to ſend Peace on Earth, but rather a Sword, Variance, Fire, and Diviſion, and that even among Relations. *Matth.* 10. 34, 35, 36. *Luke* 12. 49, 51, 52, 53. As alſo, That while the ſtrong Man armed keeps the Houſe, all the Goods are in Peace. It is true the Power the Goſpel is not the proper Cauſe of thoſe Diviſions, but the innocent Occaſion only: No; the proper Cauſe of ſinful Diviſions, is that Enmity againſt GOD, and Holineſs, which is in the Hearts of natural Men, of every Order; being ſtirred up by the Devil, and their own proud and ſelfiſh Luſts. And very often natural Men, who are the proper Cauſes of the Diviſions aforeſaid, are wont to deal with God's Servants, as *Potiphar's* Wife did by *Joſeph*; they lay all the Blame of their own Wickedneſs at their Doors, and make a loud Cry!

Such as confine Oppoſition and Diviſion, as following upon living Godlineſs and ſucceſſful Preaching, to the firſt Ages of Chriſtianity; it is much to be fear'd neither know themſelves, nor the Goſpel of Chriſt. For ſurely the nature of true Religion, as well as of Men and Devils, is the ſame in every Age.

Is not the viſible Church compoſed of Perſons of the moſt contrary Characters? While ſome are ſincere Servants of God, are not many Servants of Satan, under a religious Mask? and have not theſe a fixed Enmity againſt the other? How is it then poſſible, that a Harmony ſhould ſubſiſt between ſuch, till their Nature be changed? Can Light dwell with Darkneſs?

Undoubtedly it is a great Duty, to avoid giving juſt Cauſe of Offence to any; and it is alſo highly neceſſary, that pious Souls ſhould maintain Union and Harmony among themſelves; notwithſtanding of their different Opinions in leſſer Things. And

no doubt this is the Drift of the many Exhortations which we have to Peace and Unity in Scripture.

Surely, it cannot be reasonably suppos'd, that we are exhorted to a Unity in any Thing that is wicked, or inconsistent with the Good, or greater Good of our poor Souls: For that would be like the Unity of the Devils, a Legion of which dwelt peaceably in one Man: Or like the Unity of *Abab's* false Prophets; all these four Hundred Daubers were very peaceable and much united, and all harped on the pleasing String: Ay, they were moderate Men, and had the Majority on their Side.

But possibly some may again object against Persons going to hear others, besides their own Ministers; the Scripture about *Paul* and *Apollos*, 1 Cor. 1. 12. and say, that it is carnal. Dr. *Voetius* answers the aforesaid Objection, as follows: 'The Apostle re-
' proves (says he) such as made Sects, saying, *I am*
' of *Paul*, and *I of Apollos*— and we with him re-
' prove them. But this is far from being against the
' Choice, which one hath of Sermons and Preachers;
' seeing at one time we cannot hear all, neither
' doth the Explication and Application of all, equally
' suit such a Person, in such a Time, or Condition,
' or equally quicken, and subserve the Encrease of
' Knowledge.' Thus far he.

Because that the Apostle, in the aforesaid Place, reproves an excessive Love to, or Admiration of particular Ministers, accompanied with a sinful Contention, Slighting and Disdaining of others, who are truly godly, and with Sect-making: To say that from hence it necessarily follows, That we must make no Difference in our Choice, or in the Degrees of our Esteem of different Ministers, according to their different Gifts and Graces; is an Argument of as great Force, as to say, Because Gluttony and Drunkenness are forbidden, therefore we must nei-
ther

ther eat nor drink, or make any Choice in Drinks or Victuals, let our Constitution be what it will.

Surely the very Nature of Christian Love inclines those that are possessed of it, to love others chiefly for their Goodness, and therefore in Proportion thereto. Now, seeing the Inference in the Objection is secretly built upon this Supposition, That we should love all good Men alike; it strikes at the Foundations of that Love to the Brethren, which is laid down in Scripture, as a Mark of true Christianity, 1 *Joh.* 5. and so is carnal, with a Witness.

Again it may be objected, That the aforefaid Practice tends to grieve our Parish-Minister, and to break Congregations in Pieces.

I answer, If our Parish-Minister be grieved at our greater Good, or prefers his Credit before it; then he has good Cause to grieve over his own Rottensness and Hypocrisie. And as for Breaking of Congregations to Pieces, upon the Account of People's Going from Place to Place, to hear the Word, with a View to get greater Good; that spiritual Blindness and Death, that so generally prevails, will put this out of Danger. It is but a very few, that have got any spiritual Relish; the most will venture their Souls with any Formalist, and be well satisfied with the sapless Discourses of such dead Drones.

Well, doesn't the Apostle assert, That *Paul and Apollos are nothing*? Yes, it is true, they and all others are nothing as Efficient Causes; they could not change Men's Hearts. But were they nothing as Instruments? The Objection insinuates one of these two Things, either that there is no Difference in Means, as to their Suitableness; or that there is no Reason to expect a greater Blessing upon the most suitable Means: Both which are equally absurd, and before confuted.

But

But it may be further objected, with great Appearance of Zeal, That what has been said about People's Getting of Good, or greater Good, over their Parish-line, is a meer Fiction; for they are out of God's Way.

I answer, That there are Three monstrous Ingredients in the Objection, namely, A Begging of the Question in Debate, rash Judging, and Limiting of God.

It is a mean Thing in Reasoning, to beg or suppose that, which should be prov'd, and then to reason from it. Let it be prov'd, that they are out of God's Way; and then I will freely yield: But till this be done, bold Saysoes will not have much Weight with any but Dupes or Dunces. And for such who cry out against others for Uncharitableness, to be guilty of it themselves in the mean time in a very great Degree, is very inconsistent. Isn't it rash to judge of Things they have never heard? But those that have received Benefit, and are sensible of their own Uprightness, they will think it a light Thing, to be judged of Man's Judgment. Let *Tertullus* ascend the Theatre, and gild the Objection with the most mellifluous Ciceronian Eloquence; it will no more persuade them, that what they have felt is but a Fancy (unless they be under strong Temptations of Satan, or scared out of their Wits by frightful Expressions) than to tell a Man, in proper Language, that sees, That it is but a Notion, he does not see: Or to tell a Man that feels Pleasure or Pain, That it's but a deluded Fancy; they are quite mistaken.

Besides there is a Limiting the Holy One of Israel, in the aforesaid Objection, which sinful Sin the *Hebrews* were reprov'd for. It is a Piece of daring Presumption, to pretend by our finite Line, to fathom the infinite Depths that are in the Being and Works
of

of God. The Query of Zophar is just and reasonable, *Job* 11.7,8. *Canst thou by Searching find out GOD?*—The humble Apostle with Astonishment acknowledged, that the Ways of GOD were past finding out. *Rom.* 11.33. Surely the Wind blows where it listeth, and we cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. Doesn't JEHOVAH ride upon a gloomy Cloud? and make Darknes his Pavilion? and isn't his Path in the great Waters? *Psf.* 18. *Psf.* 77. 19.

I would conclude my present Meditations upon this Subject, by Exhorting

All those who enjoy a faithful Ministry, to a speedy and sincere Improvement of so rare and valuable a Privilege; lest by their foolish Ingratitude the Righteous GOD be provok'd, to remove the Means they enjoy, or his Blessing from them, and so at last to expose them in another State to Enduring and greater Miseries. For surely, these Sins which are committed against greater Light and Mercy, are more presumptuous, ungrateful, and inexcusable; there is in them a greater Contempt of GOD's Authority, and Slight of his Mercy; those Evils do awfully violate the Conscience, and declare a Love to Sin as Sin; such Transgressors do rush upon the Bosses of GOD's Buckler, they court Destruction without a Covering, and embrace their own Ruin with open Arms. And therefore according to the Nature of Justice, which proportions Sinners Pains, according to the Number and Heinousness of their Crimes, and the Declaration of divine Truth, you must expect an enflamed Damnation: Surely, it shall be more tolerable for *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, in the Day of the LORD, than for you, except ye repent.

And let gracious Souls be exhorted, to express the most tender Pity over such as have none but Pharisee-Teachers; and that in the Manner before described:

scribed: To which let the Example of our LORD in the Text before us, be an inducing and effectual Incitement; as well as the gracious and immense Rewards, which follow upon so generous and noble a Charity, in this and the next State.

And let those who live under the Ministry of dead Men, whether they have got the Form of Religion or not, repair to the Living, where they may be edified. Let who will, oppose it. What famous Mr. *Jenner* observes upon this Head, is most just, 'That if there be any godly Soul, or any that desires the Salvation of his Soul, and lives under a blind Guide, he cannot go out (of his Parish) without giving very great Offence; it will be tho't a Giddiness, and a Slighting of his own Minister at home. — When People came out of every Parish round about, to *John*, no Question but this bred Heart-burning against *John*, ay, and Ill-will against those People, that would not be satisfied with that Teaching they had in their own Synagogues.' Thus far he. But tho' your Neighbours growl against you, and reproach you for doing your Duty, in seeking your Souls Good; bear their unjust Censures with Christian Meekness, and persevere; as knowing that Suffering is the Lot of Christ's Followers, and that spiritual Benefits do infinitely overbalance all temporal Difficulties.

And O! that vacant Congregations would take due Care in the Choice of their Ministers! Here indeed they should hasten slowly. The Church of *Ephesus* is commended, for Trying them which said they were Apostles, and were not; and for finding them Liars. Hypocrites are against all Knowing of others, and Judging, in order to hide their own Filthiness; like Thieves they flee a Search, because of their stolen Goods. But the more they endeavour

to hide, the more they expose their Shame. Does not the spiritual Man judge all Things? Tho' he cannot know the States of subtil Hypocrites infallibly; yet may he not give a near Guess, who are the Sons of *Sceva*, by their Manner of Praying, Preaching, and Living? Many Pharisee-Teachers have got a long fine String of Prayer by Heart, so that they are never at a Loss about it; their Prayers and Preachings are generally of a Length, and both as dead as a Stone, and without all Savour. I beseech you, my dear Brethren, to consider, That there is no Probability of your getting Good, by the Ministry of Pharisees. For they are no Shepherds (no faithful ones) in Christ's Account. They are as good as none, nay, worse than none, upon some Accounts. For take them first and last, and they generally do more Hurt than Good. They serve to keep better out of the Places where they live; nay, when the Life of Piety comes near their Quarters, they rise up in Arms against it, consult, contrive and combine in their Conclaves against it, as a common Enemy, that discovers and condemns their Craft and Hypocrisie. And with what Art, Rhetorick, and Appearances of Piety, will they varnish their Opposition of Christ's Kingdom? As the Magicians imitated the Works of *Moses*, so do false Apostles, and deceitful Workers, the Apostles of Christ.

I shall conclude this Discourse with the Words of the Apostle *Paul*, 2 *Cor.* II. 14, 15.

And no Marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of Light: Therefore it is no great Thing if his Ministers also be transformed as the Ministers of Righteousness; whose End shall be according to their Works.

